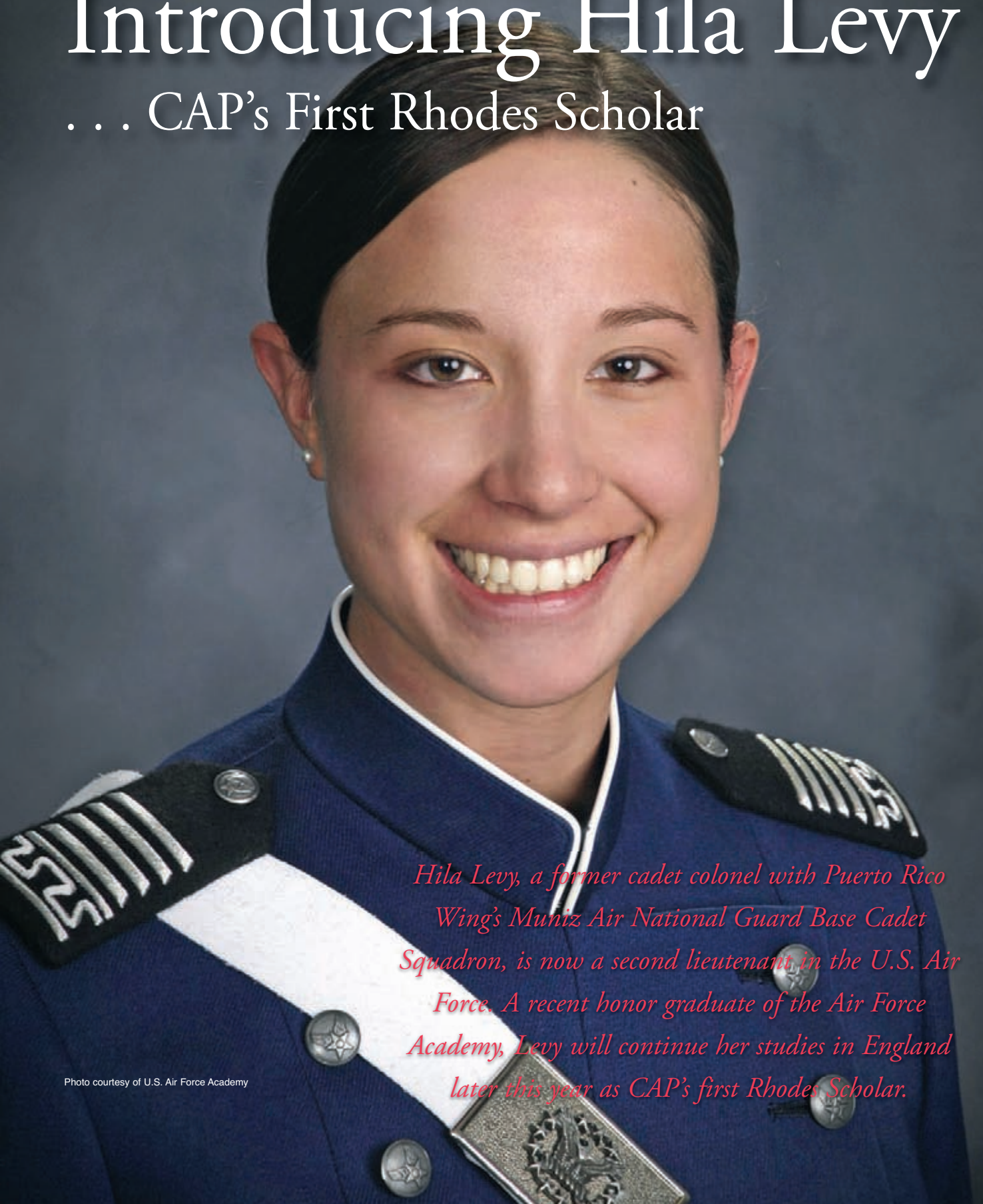


Introducing Hila Levy

... CAP's First Rhodes Scholar



Hila Levy, a former cadet colonel with Puerto Rico Wing's Muniz Air National Guard Base Cadet Squadron, is now a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force. A recent honor graduate of the Air Force Academy, Levy will continue her studies in England later this year as CAP's first Rhodes Scholar.

Photo courtesy of U.S. Air Force Academy

Head of her class

Former Cadet of the Year
leaves Air Force Academy
with top honors

By Steve Cox

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Four years after being named Civil Air Patrol's National Cadet of the Year, Hila Levy is at the head of her class again at the U.S. Air Force Academy. In fact, she's *waaaaayyyy* ahead of her class.

Newly graduated 2nd Lt. Levy was front and center at the recent graduation ceremony for the Air Force Academy's class of 2008 — the 50th graduating class. She finished as the top graduate, earning the Outstanding Cadet in the Order of Graduation Award and a spot on the academy's 100-year Honor Roll. In addition, she earned awards from the Argentine Air Force and the Chilean Air Force for graduating first in her class.

And that's not all. In September, Levy will be on her way to the University of Oxford in England, where she will use a recently acquired Rhodes Scholarship to pursue a three-year advanced research (Ph.D. equivalent) degree in public health. A native of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, Levy is the first Puerto Rican

Levy prepares for a parachute jump during training at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

resident and the first Civil Air Patrol cadet to be awarded a Rhodes Scholarship. She is only the 35th academy cadet to do so.

“That’s an awesome achievement, earning the Rhodes Scholarship. There’s no topping that,” said CAP-USAF Commander Col. Russ Hodgkins, who was on hand for graduation week ceremonies at the Air Force Academy. Hodgkins’ eldest son, Gordon, graduated from the academy’s 1st Squadron, just as he had done.

“There has been a lot of hype around the Rhodes Scholarship and it is almost overwhelming,” said Levy, adding she did not know until the Honor Roll “tapping” ceremony on graduation day that she was the first CAP cadet to earn the scholarship.

Interim CAP National Commander Brig. Gen. Amy S. Courter and Hodgkins attended the “tapping” ceremony, where Levy affixed a plate with her name, squadron name and the date to the CAP plaque in the ballroom balcony of the Air Force Academy’s hall of honor. The plaque recognizes Levy as the top former CAP cadet in the class of 2008.



Photo by Marc Huchette, CAP National Headquarters

In 2004, CAP National Cadet of the Year Col. Hila Levy of the Puerto Rico Wing receives her award from then-CAP National Commander Maj. Gen. Richard L. Bowling, left, and Air Force Association representative Richard Ortega.

Levy is only the second former CAP cadet to take top graduating honors at the academy.

Levy’s success at the Air Force Academy was no surprise to Courter. “Hila

simply puts her mind to things and gets them done,” said Courter, adding that she was particularly proud of CAP’s first Rhodes Scholar.

Levy said she felt fortunate to win the scholarship. “I was simply lucky in a competition with many wonderful people who were all overqualified,” she said. “Going in to my interview I thought I would be the last person in the group to win one of the scholarships, so I felt more lucky than accomplished. I am thankful for the opportunity to study abroad and have a break before medical school.”

Listen to Levy

U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Hila Levy offers the following advice to cadets interested in entering the Air Force Academy:

Get involved. *“I read on the USAFA Web site that a certain percentage of cadets appointed to the Academy were former CAP members, so I started to research what CAP was and see if there was any activity in Puerto Rico. I was surprised to find that Puerto Rico had such a large number of squadrons, and so I found one that met on the local army base. I joined and fell in love with the program and did my best to get up the ranks and participate in as many areas as possible. While I loved the bond I formed with my drill team, my favorite part came to be working as an aerospace education officer, because I was able to teach others the history and the science behind the aerospace program.”*

Help others. *“CAP helped me in having a knowledge base to work off of when I first entered the Academy — Air Force rank, uniform standards, marching, history and important facts and persons. Basic training puts everyone at the same level when you get there. It is more important to use your knowledge to help your classmates than it is to use it for your own benefit.”*

After her studies at Oxford, Levy will be attending the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine (Class of 2015) to obtain her M.D. Her ultimate goal is to become a career Air Force physician specializing in tropical medicine and infectious disease. "I will certainly owe enough time," she said. "Hopefully, I can work as an international health specialist in the Air Force."

Levy's interest in tropical medicine and infectious disease comes from her childhood in Puerto Rico. "I was afflicted with dengue hemorrhagic fever twice growing up," she said. "Much of my biology research at the Air Force Academy was directed toward Black Plague and dengue, so it was only fitting to try and continue that work at the next level."

When that time comes, communication shouldn't be a problem, as Levy is fluent in six languages — English, Spanish, Hebrew, French, Italian and Portuguese — and is learning her seventh, Arabic. "I grew up with several of them, and my PK-12 school taught me the rest," Levy said, adding that she completed minors in Spanish, French and Arabic while at the Air Force Academy.

The 132-pound Levy also got involved in powerlifting at the academy. "I wanted to do something different my senior year and felt like I should find something in athletics to fill my time and complement my military and academic duties," she said. "I decided powerlifting would be an interesting sport and something that I could continue doing throughout my life, as there are many divisions of the sport."

Her brief dedication to powerlifting also brought accolades. Levy finished 10th in her weight class at the 2008 U.S.A. Powerlifting Collegiate National Powerlifting Championships, held in Denver in April.

"The thing that impresses you about Hila is she just seems to do everything well," said Hodgkins.

"Everything she does, she does well."

True to form, Levy credits others for her success.

"I was brought up to work hard and always put my full effort into things," said Levy. "I do not think I did anything different or unique to succeed at the Air Force Academy. I just had a good group of classmates, faculty, superiors and subordinates to work with who complemented this."

This summer, Levy is taking a break from the books, spending her well-deserved leave time abroad in South Africa, Australia and South America. "I still have not really come to terms with the fact that I graduated or that I am a second lieutenant quite yet," she said, explaining grad week was "a whirlwind experience" for her and her family, full of paperwork as well as the ordeal of moving out of her dorm. "Luckily, I will be working at the academy in August and September, so I will get to say my goodbyes then and realize what just happened." ▲



U.S. Air Force 2nd Lt. Hila Levy places her nameplate on the CAP Honor Roll plaque during a tapping ceremony on graduation day at the Air Force Academy. Above, Levy poses in the academy's hall of honor with Interim CAP National Commander Amy S. Courter, right, and CAP-USAF Commander Col. Russ Hodgkins.

Photos by Dennis Rogers, U.S. Air Force Academy